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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S CALL ON MINISTER OF LABOR

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY. Ambassador Nolan paid a courtesy call on Botswana's Minister of Labor and Home Affairs Peter Letlhogonolo Siele on November 7. The Minister and Ambassador discussed the current situation in Botswana's prisons, a plan by President Khama to assist released prisoners in starting businesses, and the impact of the crisis in Zimbabwe on Botswana. END SUMMARY

¶2. (U) Ambassador Nolan paid a courtesy call on Botswana's Minister of Labor and Home Affairs Peter Letlhogonolo Siele on November 7 in the Minister's Office. Pol/Econ Officer attended as notetaker. The Minister was accompanied by the Deputy Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Labor and Home Affairs Victor Rantshabeng, the Deputy Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Labor and Home Affairs Lucky T. Moahi, and his private secretary McDonald Lashani. The Minister congratulated the United States on the election of President Elect Obama, and discussed common "echoes" between President Khama's November 3 State of the Nation Address and President-elect Obama's November 5 acceptance speech.

Prisons

¶3. (SBU) Ambassador Nolan asked about a report in the newspaper stating that 2800 prisoners will be released from prison in Botswana. The Minister confirmed that this was correct and that 1031 have been released to date in an attempt to ease overcrowding. Deputy Permanent Secretary Rantshabeng stated that there are currently "well above 6000" prisoners in Botswana prisons that were designed to hold 4900 inmates. He stated that the current number of prisoners is an estimate, as the final numbers for September have not yet come into his office.

¶4. (SBU) The Minister and Ambassador also discussed an issue Botswana is grappling with regarding prisoners and voting. Botswana law provides that prisoners with sentences of less than four months should be allowed to register to vote - raising the question of where they should be allowed to vote. The Minister explained that declaring a prison a polling station is problematic. Polling stations in Botswana are open to anyone who wants to vote there - raising the specter of security problems if citizens are allowed to enter the prisons to cast their votes. The Minister stated that the GOB is continuing to work on this issue.

Vocational Training in Prisons

¶5. (SBU) The Minister discussed President Khama's plan to expand vocational opportunities from only current prisoners to include recently released prisoners. The Minister explained that the plan would allow recently released prisoners to use prison facilities and equipment for a short time after their release while establishing their businesses.

President Khama wants the program to focus on items like carpentry, vegetable production, tailoring and upholstery. The Minister said that the idea is still in the planning stages and the length of time that released prisoners would be allowed to use the facilities has not yet determined, but he guessed it would be around three months. A profit sharing system between the prison and the released prisoner would be implemented. According to the Minister, this would allow the released prisoner to raise seed money for a new business and would allow the prison to recoup some of the cost incurred by the prisons for this program.

¶6. (SBU) One current problem is the lack of room in the prisons for such activities. The Minister said the plan calls for tents to be erected until prison facilities can be expanded. The Minister thinks a program such as this could help recidivism rates by giving released prisoners a trade and the opportunity to start a business. By way of background, the Minister explained that currently in Botswana prisoners can pursue trade certificates by taking classes and taking certification exams while incarcerated.

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Effect of Crisis in Zimbabwe

¶7. (SBU) The Ambassador and the Minister discussed the impact on Botswana from the crisis in Zimbabwe. Ambassador Nolan asked if the GOB had seen an increase in the number of forged documents coming out of Zimbabwe as Zimbabwean government employees are becoming increasingly desperate for income and more likely to accept bribes. Deputy Permanent Secretary Lucky Moahi stated that he took a recent trip to the border with Zimbabwe. During that trip Botswana border officials stated that they were seeing increases in fraudulent documents, including passports.

¶8. (SBU) Deputy Permanent Secretary Rantshabeng added that Botswana is spending a lot to deal with the growing influx of Zimbabweans. The GOB has been forced to increase the number of trucks taking migrants back to the border and is building an additional repatriation center to house the Zimbabweans prior to their repatriation. The GOB plans to build the new repatriation center in Gaborone to add to the four that already exist in Molepolole, Gaborone Village, Selibe Phikwe and Francistown. The Minister added that the electric fence between Botswana and Zimbabwe used to keep out animals with foot and mouth disease, which he says is widespread in animals in Zimbabwe, was still being crossed by many people desperate to leave Zimbabwe.

NOLAN